

# News Release



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Contact: Steve Capps

(916) 651-8750

## Promising Results From 2002

# Protections in Place at State Parks For 2003 Plover Nesting Season

SACRAMENTO – With the western snowy plover nesting season about to begin, California State Parks now has protection measures in place at about 30 state parks along the California coast, just as a new report provides promising results from efforts last year to protect the threatened shorebird.

“We are optimistic going into the new nesting season that we at State Parks can make a difference in the survival of the western snowy plover,” said Ruth Coleman, Acting Director of California State Parks. “From results of past management actions, and particularly efforts taken last year, we know that our efforts and those of our partners and park visitors are resulting in more nests being protected and more chicks surviving.

“Hundreds of plovers will build their nests within State Parks in the coming months,” she said. “We will do our best to see that the chicks survive.”

The plovers’ nesting season begins in mid-March and is a critical time for the species. During the nesting season, which generally lasts through September, the eggs or small birds may fall prey to avian predators or any number of animals, including red fox and skunks. The nests also may be destroyed or abandoned because of high winds or tides, or disturbance by people or their pets. Park visitors are asked to stay out of temporarily fenced areas, and be careful not to disturb any plovers or plover nests they may come upon.

The western snowy plover is about the size of a sparrow. It is pale gray-brown above and white below, with dark markings on its head and around its neck. Because of declining numbers – it is estimated that, at most, there are only about 2,000 breeding plovers left along the entire Pacific Coast – it is listed as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. After the Fish and Wildlife Service published guidelines for protecting the species, California State Parks expanded management measures in its coastal parks that provide important nesting or wintering habitat for the bird.

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These measures include fencing off areas, restricting disturbing human activities, predator control, prohibiting dogs in important habitat areas and increasing enforcement of existing dog leash laws on California state beaches. About a fourth of the California coast is within State Parks jurisdiction

Currently, 30 state parks along the coast have special management actions in place, including nest area monitoring and nest site protection. The Department's efforts to protect and enhance populations of the threatened bird are yielding promising results, according to biologists with the Department who have compiled and reviewed reports on last year's nesting season.

There were 440 nests found on State Parks property last year, according to a new report compiled from monitors' observations, about 53 percent of which were "successful," meaning that eggs were laid and it was known that at least one hatched. Two of the most closely-watched areas of the state for plover recovery are the Monterey Bay/northern Santa Cruz area and San Luis Obispo County. A significant portion of property within those areas is under the jurisdiction of State Parks.

In the Monterey Bay/Northern Santa Cruz area, plover management and monitoring are performed as a cooperative effort between State Parks, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Point Reyes Bird Observatory and others.

The monitors reported finding a total of 319 nests in the area, about half of which were on State Parks property. There were a total of 289 nesting adults observed in the study area, a 26-percent increase over the year before. Observers reported that 37 percent of the plover chicks that hatched in nests on State Parks property in the Monterey Bay/Northern Santa Cruz area eventually fledged, or reached an age considered old enough to fly. The rate compares favorably to the surrounding areas outside State Parks property. Avian predators – mostly ravens, crows and gulls – appeared to be the leading cause of nest losses in the area.

State Parks also owns substantial tracts of land in San Luis Obispo County, including Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area near Pismo Beach. It has made major efforts at Oceano Dunes to protect nesting plovers, while also maintaining the popular off-road park for public use. Last year's fledge rates at Oceano Dunes reached 56 percent, far surpassing the previous year's 4 percent fledge rate that was recorded before State Parks instituted its predator management.

The Department stepped up protection efforts in other coastal parks in San Luis Obispo County last summer – Estero Bay, Morro Strand and Montana De Oro. A total of 190 nests were observed, an 18-percent increase from the year before. Most of those – a total of 109 – were found at Montana De Oro.

Reliable information on nesting success and fledging rates were not obtained last year for the area, mostly because monitoring was conducted only once a week. However, a predator control effort at Montana De Oro from May through July resulted in a significant drop in the number of eggs or chicks preyed upon by skunks, biologists said.

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